TL1711-14

STATEMENT ON THE QUESTION OF EAST TIMOR

BY MR. ANTONIO DE SOUSA LARA
MEMBER OF THE PORTUGUESE PARLIAMENT

BEFORE THE UN SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON DECOLONISATION

New York, August 8, 1991

Mr. Chairman,

Once again a group of Portuguese petitioners comes before the Committee of Decolonization of the United Nations Organization to talk about the East-Timor territory which, as is well known, finds itself in a dramatic and unacceptable political situation on many counts.

As President of the Commission for East-Timor Affairs of the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal, I shall mention that this representation once again reflects the nature of national unity with which my country views and approaches the East-Timor problem.

Today's petitioners, as in the preceeding years, belong to the main Portuguese political parties, and as political adversaries face each other democratically in several Portuguese and European Community venues. However they freely agree on the positions assumed as regards the present and future destiny of that fraternal people.

It is universally recognized that Portugal was one of the main European colonial powers. Without wishing to go into anachronistic judgements of History and of the attitudes of our ancestors, we do not forget all the aspects which arose out of an imperial and colonial relationship such as the one which we maintained throughout several centuries. If we look with irrepressible pain on the worst episodes of our past, where tolerance gave way to oppression, culture was lost in the face of exploitation or where mean and unrevealed interests replaced the feeling of fraternity which had always been part of our beliefs and our customs, we can

also be justly proud of the sincerity with which brother countries address us today so that together we may try to build a better world. Without forgetting any of them, I recall with particular emphasis the cases of Brazil (with whom we have a treaty of equality of civil and political rights), Angola (where our mediation helped to put an end to a civil struggle which involved foreign elements) or, more recently, Mozambique, which desires to follow the same path. And, despite the smallness of our country, we must not forget the role we have been asked to play by Cape Verde, São Tomé e Principe and Guinea-Bissau in their respective processes of economic and social development, in order to improve their internal structures with a view to political democracy and social progress.

Our Revolution of 25 April 1974 opened the way for the internal democratization of Portugal and made it possible for the colonies under Portuguese government to be emancipated. We showed the world that we are not moved by any economic and geopolitical interests of concealed neo-colonialism. The best evidence of this fact can be found in the attitude of the countries which, like us, speak the Portuguese language and take decisions on its utilization on a majority basis, as it was shown in the recent signing of the "Orthographic Agreement", or the economic and political relations to which I refered above. That gives us an increased authority to come here today, before you, to speak on behalf of one of the voiceless people of the world, the martyred people of East-Timor for whom we beg justice. Generally speaking, justice consists in giving each person that to which he is entitled. The people of East-Timor are entitled to an opportunity to express their wishes.

I have not come here to recall the resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly on the status of the territory and people of Timor, neither shall I remind you of the formal point of view of this Organization on Portugal's position as regards those non-autonomous territory and people.

We would be denying our own history, both past and recent, if we did not come here once again, on behalf of the people of east Timor and of Portugal, to say that we do not reject our responsibilities, that we are not moved by any selfish aims and interests and that we ardently wish to see international law respected in one of the last great pending questions that cast a shadow over international affairs at the end of the 20th century.

Together with International Law which has been positively defined and outlined, there is a dominant International Moral. The generality, abstraction and relative timelessness of the Law are complemented by the humanity of the values which History and its

agents, that is to say, all of us, produce dialectically.

The question of self-determination for the people of East-Timor is not just a Portuguese, Indonesian, or Timorese problem. It is a question which is the concern of the international community as a whole and of each of its members individually. Those of us who have suffered in the flesh and soul the yoke of oppression and tyranny have the faculty and the duty to revolt in the name of Justice and Law, against situations similar to ours and which man and history have not yet resolved.

And as more and more similar cases are resolved there is greater indignation regarding those which are yet to be settled.

And when a new generation which has known no past different from the present, revolts to the point of sacrificing their own lives, then we must pay attention to the signs of the times and understand that postponement of a solution will not silence repressed hopes, collective existential soul is not cowed by force or by terror and genocide and brutal disregard for human rights are no longer a subject of the internal jurisdiction of states. Therefore the international community must have an increasingly active role in the defence of the weak, the victims of despotism and injustice.

The question of East-Timor will be decided when all and each one of us assume our share of the responsibility in this process. May God enlighten those who must be responsible.